

[signed September 30, 1998]

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Guidance on Program Evaluation at EPA

From: Sallyanne Harper
Chief Financial Officer (2710)

To: Assistant Administrators
General Counsel
Inspector General
Associate Administrators
Regional Administrators

The purpose of this memorandum is to communicate responsibilities for program evaluation in the Agency under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993.

Background

EPA has been without a centralized program evaluation function since 1995, when the Program Evaluation Division in the Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation (OPPE) disbanded. The Agency now has to reconsider the need for such formal program evaluation as it implements GPRA. Although GPRA does not include specific requirements for conducting program evaluations, it does require the Agency to report schedules for and summaries of program evaluations that have been or will be conducted. Thus, our expectation is that Agency programs and Regions will undertake program evaluations as necessary or helpful to support strategic and annual planning and accountability. During the preparation of the Agency's Annual Performance Report (the first of which is due to Congress in March, 2000) and the revision of the Agency's Strategic Plan (required next by September, 2000 and thereafter in three-year cycles), OCFO will ask the Agency's Goal Teams for information on program evaluations that program offices and Regions have conducted or are planning to conduct.

Definition of Program Evaluation

There are many definitions of program evaluation and numerous sources of information on the role of program evaluation for public agencies. Perhaps the most relevant definition for EPA

comes from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance on strategic and annual performance planning (Circular A-11, Part 2, last revised in July 1998): “An assessment, through objective measurement and systematic analysis, of the manner and extent to which Federal programs achieve intended objectives.” OMB also includes process evaluations in its definition of program evaluation (i.e., evaluations of the mechanisms by which programs achieve their goals or objectives).

GPRA and OMB Expectations

OMB guidance on strategic and annual performance planning elaborates on the GPRA provisions for program evaluation. OMB requires agencies and departments to include in their Strategic Plans summaries of program evaluations used to prepare the plan (e.g., evaluations used in establishing and revising the strategic goals and objectives) and a schedule for future evaluations. This schedule is to outline the general methodology to be used (e.g., a longitudinal study), timetable, and the general scope of the evaluations, as well as the particular issues to be addressed. At a minimum, schedules for future evaluations are to cover the fiscal years prior to the next revision of the Strategic Plan.

In addition to these provisions, GPRA requires that agencies include in their Annual Performance Report a summary of the “findings of program evaluations completed during the fiscal year covered by the report.” In general, program evaluation is to provide a link between planning and reporting on performance by helping to measure progress against long-term and annual goals; results of program evaluations also may help us to adjust the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan. Neither GPRA nor OMB guidance specifies the number of evaluations to be undertaken or requires agencies to focus evaluations on particular types of functions.

Role of Program Evaluation in Agency Planning and Accountability

Program evaluation can help support Agency implementation of GPRA in a number of ways. For example, without evaluation, some programs may not be able to determine whether they have achieved certain strategic goals and objectives. In other cases, programs may need to assess cause and effect relationships between a program’s activities and environmental outcomes, for example, the relationship between compliance assistance efforts and improvements in the environment. Evaluation may help the Agency determine appropriate goals for particular programs or help assess the relative value of different strategies for reaching goals. In addition, program evaluation may not only help to assess a program’s achievement of desired results with a particular strategy, but also whether the program is implementing the strategy as intended.

As program evaluation can be useful to the Agency in fulfilling the requirements of GPRA, I am asking the Agency’s Goal Teams to do the following:

- , at the time of the revision of the Agency’s Strategic Plan, provide input on program evaluations used to prepare their sections of the Plan and a schedule for future evaluations; and

, at the time of preparation of the Annual Performance Report, provide findings of program evaluations completed during the fiscal year covered by the report.

In pursuing program evaluations, I urge program and Regional managers to focus them on the most important of the Agency's functions, within their respective goals. OCFO staff are available to help program and Regional managers identify the most appropriate candidate programs and processes for evaluation and will help the teams design their approaches to coordinating the evaluations.

Related Agency Activities

The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) also has been interested in EPA's use of program evaluation. The Office of Reinvention (OR) is currently working closely with NAPA as it carries out a study to evaluate innovative efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental management. NAPA will focus mainly on the Agency's reinvention initiatives, and will be seeking to identify lessons learned that the Agency can then apply in its core programs. NAPA is scheduled to complete its studies and report to the Agency and Congress by May, 2000.

This guidance fulfills OCFO's Commitment #4.2 included in my December 30, 1996, memorandum to Michael Simmons, Deputy Inspector General, "Response to the Final Survey Report E1 AMF5-20-0013: EPA's Implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act." If you have questions regarding program evaluation with regard to GPRA, please contact Josh Baylson (260-3644) or Kate Donaldson (260-7567) of OCFO. If you have questions related to the NAPA project or other evaluations of innovative management activities, please contact Irv Auerbach of OR at 260-1020.

cc: David Ziegele
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Goal Teams
PBAA contacts